

Klamath Falls: Eco-Terrorism at Its Worst

Part 2 of 3

Congressional Hearing Report by J.J. Johnson 06.19.01

ECOLOGICAL TERRORISM

Other media outlets won't waste any time illustrating why there is a need to protect certain endangered species. But as is common with folks who have a given agenda, many times the 'other side of the story' is missed. Even if saving the sucker fish in the Klamath Basin was a 'good intention', it would give the phrase "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions" new meaning.

Several residents discussed openly how lack of water in the Klamath Basin is in fact killing wildlife in the area below. Nancy Kandra, one of the areas largest land holders spoke about the loss of wildlife. The Kandra home has walls that are covered with wildlife photos.

She drove to an irrigation ditch with little water, where the last of the geese remained a few days before. They were gone. "These days, the raccoons and squirrels feed on the eggs of their young, since there is no place to protect them." During an earlier visit, Kandra also discussed the lack of birds in the area due to few or no crops being planted in the basin.

"We love nature. We are nature. Would it make sense for the farmer to not care about our own environment?" she asked.

Klamath basin has over 1400 miles of irrigation canals that are all but dry. It was here where waterfowl of various types made their home. But unlike humans who can pick up and move, these animals naturally return to the place where they were born, raised, and foraged for food.

Sharron Molder, the high school principal at Tulelake High School on California's northern edge, spoke with Sierra Times by telephone on Monday, agonizing over how the pelicans (that once heavily populated the area) are now gone. "It used to be so nice to see the pelicans swooping down into the canals to get fish. Now you see then looking down, only to come up with nothing and fly away. Some of them are dying in the dry ditches."

Prior to 1906, the Klamath basin contained over 350,000 acres of naturally occurring seasonal and permanent "wetland habitat." But the Reclamation Project removed 75% of that area. As a result, the regions wetlands must be artificially irrigated in order for the wildlife in the Klamath Basin to even survive. This is an important note for the environmentalist who may be reading this:

According to Bill Gaines, California Waterfowl Association's Director for Government Affairs, there have been an identified 430 species, including the bald eagle, that have made a home for themselves

[More Casualties of Federal Policy](#)



A Klamath Basin Irrigation Canal



Where waterfowl once nested. Dead animals now rest here.

in the Klamath National Wildlife Refuge. "...As waterfowl are forced to crowd onto what little wetland habitat may remain, there will likely be significant die-offs due to the increased risk of avian botulism, and cholera.

Gaines stated that this may mark the beginning of "the end for our Pacific Flyway waterfowl resource."

Dam on the A Canal in Klamath Falls



Where Dreams are locked behind the gates.

To summarize again for the environmentalist and animal rights activists: the so-called attempt to save a sucker fish, threatens the lives of at least 430 other animal species. Many of which are dying already.

There's another part of the ecological system that is under attack due to this federal action, but it rarely gets noted in the ecological files. The social well being of Klamath Basin's children has suffered after this short time with no water.

"We don't just raise potatoes, horseradish and onions. We also grow kids," Molder told the committee Saturday.

"When I first had to tell the news at school, many of the children were crying," said Sharron Molder. After the

water was shut off, the frustration of many parents of the ranchers and farmers trickled down to the next generation. "I had a report of one child that just split another's lip open for no reason. And one who accused another of rape," she told Sierra Times. "We've never had these problems until the water was turned off." Many agreed with her testimony about how the Klamath Water Crisis has effected the children of the area:

"Many of the students' recent writings and actions indicate even more significant, adverse impacts on the school community. Based on my years of experience in education I recognize and understand the emotional and behavioral impacts of stress on the school population. Our recent 4th quarter grade reports show a significant increase in D's and F's. This time frame parallels the news of the water crisis. There are students who emotionally gave up. We expect our SAT 9 scores to drop district wide. It was very hard to motivate many of our students to focus beyond the crisis. The children in our schools are well aware of the financial and emotional health of their families. Many of the families in our schools have participated for years in the successful agricultural business community. Many of the parents of our students are now unemployed or are employers who have not only been forced to lay off long-term employees, but face the prospect of financial ruin themselves. The emotional pain and stress felt by the parents is recognized and transmitted to the students. As hope for a rapid solution fell, referrals and problems increased. I began to deal with behaviors I had not witnessed in three years. We are concerned that facing a summer with no jobs for high school students, the problems could continue to increase. We usually process about 100 student work permits, mostly for field workers. We have processed six [so far this year.]

Another student, our valedictorian for the class of 2001, Brianna Byrne, is on her way to Santa Clara University. She is a member of a Klamath Basin family, in farming for a century. At a hearing before the California State Assembly, Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee on May 22, 2001 Brianna stated, "How can I and the other members of my chapter of Future Farmers feel any sense of security in pursuing agriculture as a career when the government of the strongest nation on earth takes away the core of our history and community based upon unproven and speculative science?"

These are the children of farmers and ranchers in the Klamath upper basin. They are part of organizations (Future Farmers of America) that promote agriculture. They depend on the livelihoods of their parent's labor. As the topsoil is now being blown away by the wind, so are these children's future. Unless there is a change in federal policy, they won't be around to help care for the ecological system in the Klamath Basin. This makes them part of that ecology.

Terrorism is defined as: "The use (or threaten use) of force by a group or individual, to achieve political or social goals." The force in this case is a small dam on the north end of Klamath Falls, Oregon holding up 6 inches of water, or 10 percent of the water supply from two counties - two states in need. According to Dave Solem of the Klamath Irrigation District, this amount (and more) sits dormant in the Klamath Reservoir. The political and social goal in this matter is to "save the environment - for the children, or course.

Tell that to the 430 species, the bald eagle, and the lives of thousands in the Upper basin.

Empty canals lead to empty irrigation ditches, to empty fields, to empty refuges, to empty little children, to empty hearts. All this because of "empty promises" from the Federal Government.

But these are Westerners. These are Americans - a special breed of mankind woven into the fabric of Americana. Eighty years of the blood, sweat and tears they've pumped into this land make them - part of the landscape itself.

...And the majority of this special breed in the Klamath Falls Upper Basin, and the surrounding areas, are not for sale at any price.

Next: [The Political Battefield](#)

Welcome to the Klamath Basin



One of many signs posted along OR Rt. 39

Permission to reprint/republish granted, as long as you include the name of our site, the author, and our URL.
www.SierraTimes.com

All Sierra Times news reports, and all editorials are © 2001 SierraTimes.com (unless otherwise noted)

SierraTimes.com™ A Subsidiary of J.J. Johnson Enterprises, Inc.